

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2845
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
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AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 19375

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR SOPN EG LE
SUBJECT: EGYPT AND LEBANESE SITUATION

1. AT DINNER LAST EVENING, I HAD LONG TALK WITH MINSTATE
BOUTROS GHALI AND AHMED BAHA AL-DIN, WELL KNOWN EGYPTIAN
JOURNALIST NOW RESIDING IN KUWAIT, ABOUT LEBANON.
DISCUSSION PROMPTED BY BAHA AL-DIN'S COMMENT THAT KUWAITIS
AND OTHER ARABS HAVE EXPRESSED SURPRISE TO HIM AT PAUCITY
OF NEWS IN EGYPTIAN PRESS ABOUT LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS.
THEY VIEW THIS, ACCORDING TO BAHA AL-DIN, AS EVIDENCE OF
EGYPTIAN DISINTEREST IN LEBANON.

2. GHALI RUEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGED VALIDITY OF THIS OBSERVA-
TION. HE RECALLED THAT WHEN RECENTLY IN ROME FOR POPE
PAUL'S FUNERAL, FORMER LEBANESE PRESIDENT HELU AND FORMER
LEBANESE PRIMIN AL-SULH HAD MADE SPECIAL POINT OF ASKING
TO SEE HIM. THEY HAD REQUESTED THAT HE SEND MESSAGE TO
SADAT THAT EGYPT NOT ABANDON LEBANON, AS IT SEEMED TO
BE DOING. LEBANESE DEBACLE, IF ALLOWED TO CONTINUE, COULD
ENGULF ENTIRE AREA. THEY HAD RECALLED EGYPT'S PAST INTER-
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EST IN LEBANON AND URGED THAT SADAT SEEK WAYS TO RENEW
THAT INTEREST. THEIR PARTICULAR CONCERN, AS GHALI INTER-
PRETED IT, WAS FEAR OF EVENTUAL SYRIAN DOMINATION OF
LEBANON. GHALI SAID HE HAD AGREED TO CONVEY THEIR MESSAGE
TO SADAT, BUT HAD CAUTIONED THEM THAT IN PRESENT POLARIZA-
TION OF ARAB WORLD, THERE IS LITTLE THAT GOE CAN DO TO HELP.

3. ON LACK OF EGYPTIAN PRESS INTEREST IN LEBANON, GHALI CONFIRMED THAT THIS IS SO. REASON, ACCORDING TO HIM, IS THAT ANYTHING EGYPT SAYS OR DOES ABOUT LEBANON WILL INEVITABLY BE VIEWED BY SYRIA AS CHALLENGING LATTER'S ACTIVITIES. ASSETS THAT EGYPT ONCE HAD IN LEBANON, GHALI SADLY REMARKED, ARE ALL GONE. EGYPT'S INABILITY TO STOP SYRIANS FROM MASSIVE MILITARY INTERVENTION IN 1976 TESTIFIED TO ITS LACK OF LEVERAGE. FOR ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES, SYRIANS NOW DOMINATE LEBANON. THEY MAY BE HAVING A DIFFICULT TIME THERE, BUT EGYPT IS NOT WILLING OR ABLE TO CHALLENGE THEM.

4. GHALI NOTED THAT THERE HAS NOT BEEN AN EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR IN BEIRUT FOR PAST NINE MONTHS. HE ASSERTED AMBASSADOR WAS WITHDRAWN BECAUSE SYRIANS LET IT BE KNOWN THAT THEY DID NOT WANT HIM THERE AND THAT HIS PHYSICAL SAFETY WOULD BE ENDANGERED IF HE REMAINED. HENCE, EGYPTIAN EMBASSY IS HEADED BY RELATIVELY JUNIOR OFFICER.

5. IN CIRCUMSTANCES, GHALI STATED, EGYPTIAN PUBLIC MEDIA HAVE BEEN ADVISED TO LIMIT THEMSELVES TO FACTUAL COVERAGE OF LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS. TO DO MORE WOULD SIMPLY GENERATE PUBLIC PRESSURES THAT GOE SHOULD SEEK TO PLAY A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN LEBANON THAN ITS CAPABILITIES ALLOW.

6. COMMENT: GHALI'S OBSERVATIONS ARE ALL TOO TRUE.
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SADAT'S POLICY DURING 1976 CIVIL WAR IN LEBANON OF SUPPORTING ANY ELEMENTS, HOWEVER DISREPUTABLE, THAT OPPOSED SYRIANS WAS DEAD-ENDED AND EGYPTIANS TODAY ADMIT THIS. I AM REMINDED THAT IT IS WELL OVER A YEAR THAT ANY EGYPTIAN OFFICIAL HAS RAISED THE SUBJECT OF LEBANON WITH ME. WHENEVER IT HAS COME UP, IT HAS BEEN AT OUR INITIATIVE. IT IS ALMOST AS IF GOE HAS ACCEPTED FACT THAT LEBANON IS A SPECIAL SYRIAN PRESERVE--AT LEAST FOR NOW.
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